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NEA Chairman Rocco Landesman and Rear Admiral Alton L. Stocks Announce Operation Homecoming at Walter Reed National Military Medical Center

Expressive writing will be part of healing protocol for returning troops



Rear Admiral Alton L. Stocks, Commander of Walter Reed National Military Medical Center, and NEA Chairman Rocco Landesman in the art therapy room, during the announcement of Operation Homecoming at The National Intrepid Center of Excellence (NICoE). Photo courtesy of the National Intrepid Center of Excellence

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"Trauma comes through the senses, and art can heal through the senses," said an audience member at the recent National Summit: Arts in Healing for Warriors at the Walter Reed National Military Medical Center.

For the first time, the National Endowment for the Arts' critically acclaimed **Operation Homecoming** writing program will take place in a clinical setting as part of a formal medical protocol to help heal service members at the National Intrepid Center of Excellence (NICoE) at Walter Reed National Military Medical Center in Bethesda, Maryland. The NICoE is a new facility that provides an interdisciplinary team assessment in a holistic, patient- and family-centered environment, and is dedicated to providing care to service members and their families dealing with the signature wounds from the Iraq and Afghanistan wars: Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) and Psychological Health (PH) conditions.

Over a year-long pilot phase, Operation Homecoming at the NICoE will consist of two elements: an expressive writing workshop for troops as part of their clinical rehabilitation, and a more informal four-week creative writing and storytelling series for service members and their families at the Fisher House, the residence for families and patients at Walter Reed. These creative writing sessions will be led by writers with military experience or previous experience working with the military community. After the pilot phase, Operation Homecoming at the NICoE will be evaluated for possible replication at other rehabilitation centers around the country.

Operation Homecoming is a landmark partnership between the NEA and the Department of Defense. The program is being conducted with programmatic support from The Writer's Center. Operation Homecoming has been sponsored by a partnership with NEA and The Boeing Company since its inception in 2004. The Boeing Company will support Operation Homecoming programs at Fisher House.

"The National Endowment for the Arts is honored to partner with the Department of Defense to incorporate Operation Homecoming creative writing workshops into sessions with patients and families at this state-of-the-art healing center," said NEA Chairman Rocco Landesman. "There are strong indications that expressive writing and other forms of arts engagement can play an important role in improving the health and well-being of service men and women. Now it's our duty to test and advance those practices that prove to be most effective, and a world class treatment and research institute like the NICoE is exactly the place to do just that."

"Art makes a difference in the quality of life for our wounded warriors and those around them," said Rear Admiral Alton L. Stocks, Commander of Walter Reed National Military Medical Center. "Operation Homecoming will be a welcome addition to NICoE's innovative treatments for returning troops and a positive expressive outlet for their families."

Operation Homecoming writing workshops will be integrated into the NICoE's groundbreaking, interdisciplinary approach to working with patients and their families. This holistic approach ranges from physical and neurological exams, to family evaluation, nutrition, alternative medicine, and art therapy. The NICoE's Healing Arts program uses art therapies such as visual arts, mask making, and other art forms to give troops a creative outlet for their experiences.

Operation Homecoming: Writing the Wartime Experience was created in 2004 by the NEA to help U.S. troops and their families write about their wartime experiences in Afghanistan, Iraq, and stateside. Between 2004 and 2009, Operation Homecoming conducted more than 60 writing workshops for troops and veterans at military installations, writers centers, and military medical centers. A global call for submissions from troops and families resulted in an anthology and an archive housed at the Library of Congress. The program produced educational resources on creative writing, and inspired two award-winning documentaries.

For more information, visit [Operation Homecoming](#)

About the National Endowment for the Arts

The National Endowment for the Arts was established by Congress in 1965 as an independent agency of the federal government. To date, the NEA has awarded more than \$4 billion to support artistic excellence, creativity, and innovation for the benefit of individuals and communities. The NEA extends its work through partnerships with state arts agencies, local leaders, other federal agencies, and the philanthropic sector. To join the discussion on how art works, visit the NEA at www.arts.gov.

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